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NICARAGUAN REBELS REPORTEDLY 'FOOL' CIA ON PURGE
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WASHINGTON (AP) - REAGAN ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS SAY THE LIMITS OF CIA CONTROL OVER THE REBELS IT BACKS IN NICARAGUA HAVE BEEN MADE EVIDENT BY HONDURAS' CHARGES THAT THE REBELS HAVE MURDERED POLITICAL DISSIDENTS IN HONDURAS.

THE OFFICIALS, WHO INSISTED ON ANONYMITY, SAID THE HONDURAN ALLEGATIONS CAUGHT THE CIA OFF GUARD. THEY SAID REBEL LEADERS HAD ASSURED THE CIA THAT A KEY MILITARY OFFICER ALLEGEDLY IMPLICATED IN THE ABUSES HAD BEEN EXPELLED TWO YEARS AGO FROM THE NICARAGUAN DEMOCRATIC FORCE.

THE U.S.-BACKED FORCE, KNOWN IN NICARAGUA BY ITS SPANISH INITIALS, FDN, HAS BEEN FIGHTING FOR FOUR YEARS TO OVERTHROW THE LEFTIST SANDANISTA GOVERNMENT IN NICARAGUA.

U.S. OFFICIALS EXPRESSED SURPRISE LAST WEEK WHEN INFORMED THAT, ACCORDING TO STATEMENTS FROM TWO REBEL LEADERS, THE OFFICER, COL. RICARDO "CHINO" LAU, HAD NOT BEEN PURGED BUT AT LEAST UNTIL LAST YEAR WAS STILL WITH THE REBEL GROUP.

"IF LAU WAS THERE AFTER JANUARY 1983, IT WAS CLEARLY DECEPTIVE," SAID ONE OFFICIAL FAMILIAR WITH U.S. EFFORTS TO RID THE FDN OF LAU AND OTHER NATIONAL GUARD OFFICERS WHO FOUGHT FOR LONGTIME DICTATOR ANASTASIO SOMOZA BEFORE HIS OVERTHROW IN 1979.

THE OFFICIAL SAID FDN LEADERS, OPPOSED TO THE PURGE, APPARENTLY DECIDED TO "FOOL THE GRINGOS" BY SHIFTING LAU FROM A PUBLIC TO A SECRET POSITION.

ANOTHER OFFICIAL SAID THE INCIDENT SHOWED THAT WHILE THE CIA HAD DIRECT COMMAND AND CONTROL OVER CERTAIN OPERATIONS, SUCH AS THE MINING OF NICARAGUA'S HARBORS, THE AGENCY HAD ONLY LIMITED INFLUENCE OVER THE FDN'S INTERNAL OPERATIONS.

IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, EDGAR CHAMORRO, FORMER FDN PROPAGANDA CHIEF, SAID LAU WAS NEVER OUSTED FROM THE REBEL GROUP, AS THE CIA WAS TOLD, BUT WAS SIMPLY MOVED FROM HIS POST AS THE FDN'S INTELLIGENCE OFFICER TO HEAD OF THE REBELS' COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE UNIT.

CHAMORRO SAID HE BELIEVED LAU'S CONTINUED PRESENCE WAS KNOWN TO SOME CIA PERSONNEL IN THE FIELD, DESPITE CLAIMS FROM ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON THAT THEY THOUGHT LAU HAD BEEN PURGED. LAU'S CURRENT WHEREABOUTS COULD NOT BE ASCERTAINED, AND CIA SPOKESMAN GEORGE LAUDER REFUSED TO DISCUSS THE MATTER.

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LAU'S NAME SURFACED INSIDE THE ADMINISTRATION THIS MONTH IN CONNECTION WITH A HONDURAN MILITARY INVESTIGATION OF THE KILLINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES OF ABOUT 250 OPPONENTS OF THE PRO-AMERICAN HONDURAN GOVERNMENT.

HONDURAN SOURCES CLOSE TO THE INVESTIGATION HAVE TOLD THE AP AND OTHER NEWS ORGANIZATIONS THAT SINCE 1980, NICARAGUAN REBELS HAD KILLED 15 TO 18 DISSIDENTS ON BEHALF OF THE HONDURAN MILITARY. ONE SOURCE SAID LAU WAS INVOLVED IN SOME OF THOSE ACTIONS.

STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN BERNARD KALB SAID LAST WEEK THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAD "NO INFORMATION WHICH WOULD SUBSTANTIATE" THE HONDURAN CHARGES. LAST WEDNESDAY, THE CIA CIRCULATED A SECRET REPORT DISPUTING THE PRESS ACCOUNTS AND QUOTING SOME HONDURAN MILITARY OFFICIALS AS DENYING THEIR INVESTIGATION WOULD IMPLICATE THE FDN.

FDN SPOKESMAN BOSCO MATAMOROS ALSO DENIED THE ALLEGATIONS. HE ADDED THAT HE BELIEVED LAU WAS REMOVED DURING AN EARLY REORGANIZATION OF THE FDN, WHICH WAS FORMED IN 1981, BUT HE WOULD NOT PROVIDE DATES FOR LAU'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE FDN.

INITIALLY, ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS TOLD THE AP THAT THE FDN WAS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR LAU'S ALLEGED ACTIONS BECAUSE, THEY SAID, HE BECAME INVOLVED IN THOSE ACTIVITIES AFTER HE LEFT THE HONDURAN-BASED REBEL GROUP AND WENT TO WORK FOR THE NOW-DEPOSED HONDURAN MILITARY CHIEF, GUSTAVO ALVAREZ MARTINEZ.

ONE U.S. OFFICIAL SAID THE CIA BEGAN PRESSING FDN LEADERS TO OUST LAU IN SEPTEMBER 1982 AND WAS ASSURED BY REBEL LEADERS THAT LAU WAS REMOVED IN JANUARY 1983. THE OFFICIAL SAID THE CIA WAS THEN TOLD THAT LAU WAS HIRED BY ALVAREZ TO RUN A SECRET HONDURAN "COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE" UNIT.

BUT THAT TIMING CONFLICTS WITH A STATEMENT BY FDN PRESIDENT ADOLFO CALERO, PUBLISHED IN THE NEW YORK TIMES ON APRIL 12, 1984, IN WHICH CALERO SAID HE HAD RECEIVED LAU'S RESIGNATION SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE - MORE THAN A YEAR AFTER THE CIA WAS TOLD LAU HAD LEFT.

ASKED ABOUT LAU LAST WEEK, CALERO SAID LAU IS NOT AN FDN OFFICER BUT "COULD HAVE BEEN" BEFORE CALERO BECAME AN FDN LEADER AT THE START OF 1983. CONFRONTED WITH HIS STATEMENT TO THE TIMES, CALERO SAID HE COULD NOT RECALL EVERYTHING HE MIGHT HAVE SAID A YEAR AGO.

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BUT CHAMORRO SAID THAT EVEN THE 1984 DEPARTURE DATE IS INCORRECT. HE SAID THAT ALTHOUGH LAU DID SUBMIT HIS RESIGNATION TO CALERO; IT WAS NOT ACCEPTED AND LAU CONTINUED TO DIRECT THE FDN'S COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS.

IN ADDITION; THOMAS POSEY; SPOKESMAN FOR CIVILIAN-MILITARY ASSISTANCE; A PRIVATE AMERICAN GROUP THAT HAS SENT VOLUNTEERS TO TRAIN FDN TROOPS; SAID HE SAW LAU WITH FDN MILITARY CHIEF BERMUDEZ IN TEGUCIGALPA; HONDURAS; ABOUT THREE WEEKS AGO.

INFORMED OF CALERO'S 1984 TIMES' INTERVIEW; CHAMORRO'S REMARKS AND POSEY'S STATEMENT; TWO U.S. OFFICIALS WHO HAD EARLIER INSISTED THAT LAU HAD BEEN REMOVED CONCEDED THAT THE CIA HAD APPARENTLY BEEN DECEIVED.

CONGRESS CUT OFF COVERT CIA FUNDING FOR THE NICARAGUAN REBELS LAST YEAR; BUT PRESIDENT REAGAN IS EXPECTED TO PUSH FOR NEW ASSISTANCE AFTER THE CONGRESSIONAL BAN EXPIRES FEB. 28.